CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.789
13 March 1998

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-NINTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 13 March 1998, at 6.40 p.m.

President: Mr. Hofer (Switzerland)

GE.98-60788 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 789th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Despite the intense efforts made by all delegations over the last few weeks with a view to enabling the Conference to begin its substantive work, we are not yet able today to reach a compromise on our programme of work. However, I think I can say that we were able to define the outlines of a political compromise which will have to be the subject of future consultations with a view to the finalization of an agreement. The various versions of the draft decision on the programme of work on which we have all worked energetically over the last few weeks remain in my view a solid political basis which we must do everything possible to preserve, because they rest on a fair balance of interests and priorities on all sides. Therefore, our collective efforts should be continued with a view to preserving what we have achieved and deepening our dialogue in order to overcome the final obstacles remaining on our path. I therefore urge the Conference to take advantage of the momentum created since the beginning of our session in order to consolidate the areas of agreement noted so far and to try to arrive at solutions on the points which are still pending.

Are there any delegations which would like to take the floor at this stage? I give the floor to the representative of Morocco, Ambassador Benjelloun-Touimi.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from French): Mr. President, I would not like your term of office to end without thanking you for the work you have accomplished. I think we have all said in the informal meeting how much we appreciated the clarity and transparency with which you have conducted the work of the Conference during your term of office, and I would like this to appear in the final record of this meeting. I think you have moved matters forward and now we are more familiar with the various positions. We have taken a positive step although we have not been able to adopt a programme of work. Accept my thanks on behalf of many of my colleagues.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Morocco. Are there any other delegations that wish to speak? It seems not.

As you know, the representative of Turkey, Ambassador Uluçevik, is about to leave Geneva, having been called by his Government to fulfil other important duties. He was the first representative of his country in the Conference following its admission as a fully-fledged member. During that period, he presented and defended the positions of his Government on the subjects under discussion at the Conference with an authority and diplomatic talent recognized by all. His contribution as coordinator of the Western Group to drawing out a consensus on the programme of work for the Conference should also be highlighted. I would therefore like, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to express to Ambassador Uluçevik and his family all our best wishes for success and personal happiness. I give the floor to the representative of Turkey, Ambassador Uluçevik.

Mr. ULUÇEVIK (Turkey): Mr. President, thank you for your kind words of introduction before giving me the floor. I had prepared this statement because of my own optimism, which included warm words of congratulations on the occasion of your achievement today of the adoption of a decision on our programme of work, which also would have represented a turning point in the recent history of the CD. Unfortunately, the very much wished-for and expected landmark development did not take place this afternoon. Therefore, I am compelled to modify my statement accordingly. Yet, as I am sure everybody present here will agree, you deserve the warmest words of tribute and congratulations for all you have done throughout your presidency. You really have performed your duties as President admirably well. A few days of delay in our decision will never detract from your personal success.

I am painfully aware that it is not only unusual but also surprising that a representative in the CD who is next in line for the podium where Turkey will sit for the first time takes the floor to bid farewell at this late hour. But as a wise and experienced diplomat once stated: "The life of a diplomat takes many turns, and in a lifetime we must be prepared for surprises". Let me, however, add in the next breath that my sense of deprivation has adequately and satisfactorily been compensated by the decision of my Government on my new assignment.

It has been a pleasant coincidence to have fulfilled my duties as Coordinator of the Western Group while you were at the helm, Mr. President. I shall always remember it as the major highlight of my tenure in this august body.

My first acquaintance with the multilateral arms control and disarmament forum, as well as with this prestigious Salle du Conseil, was in May 1969, 10 months after the conclusion of the NPT. In those days, under the procedures and working methods of the ENDC, that is, the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, and its successor the CCD, that is, the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, the staff members of the non-member countries were allowed occasionally to follow the public sittings of the ENDC or CCD from the gallery.

During the period of my first assignment in Geneva as First Secretary of the Turkish Mission, that is, from May 1969 to September 1972, this Salle du Conseil, with its dramatic murals and early twentieth-century decor, witnessed the successful conclusion in 1970 of the negotiations in the CCD on the so-called Seabed Treaty, and again in 1971 on the Biological Weapons Convention.

On 3 July 1969, when the membership of the ENDC was ceremoniously expanded to 26, thus becoming the CCD, I was sitting as usual in the public gallery and wishing, with the innocent sentiments of a junior diplomat imbued with envy and admiration for the privilege and honour the 26 members were enjoying, that one day Turkey would become a member of that exclusive club and I would become its representative.

(Mr. Uluçevik, Turkey)

Twenty-seven years later my wishes became true. With the decision of the CD on 17 June 1996 to expand its membership by admitting 23 new members, Turkey became a full member in the CD at a historic time when the Conference was finalizing its work on the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which the CD went on to add to its impressive list of achievements and that of its predecessors. The expansion of the membership of the CD was not only a landmark development but also, being the first representative of Turkey in this body, bestowed on my humble person the singular honour of sitting in the same Council Chamber which in the late 1960s and early 1970s served as a stage for the unforgettable performances of the stars, among whom are names like García Robles of Mexico, Ortiz de Rozas of Argentina, George Ignatief of Canada, Alva Myrdal of Sweden, Kemaluddin Ahmed of Pakistan, and as Co-Chairmen of the CCD, James Leonard of the USA and Roshchin of the then Soviet Union are still fresh in my memory. I am highly aware of the fact that as a result of Turkey's membership in the CD I have been put in the fortunate position of associating with the finest brains and most qualified professionals of the world's diplomatic community.

Despite the deep personal satisfaction I have had from representing my country in the CD, I must admit that professionally I have not been satisfied, rather even a little disappointed.

We have all been referring in our statements to the CD as the sole negotiating body on disarmament. Yet throughout my 21 months of participation in its work, I have not witnessed any negotiations taking place in the CD on any kind of arms control or disarmament measures since the conclusion of the CTBT. This undesirable situation has compelled some of our colleagues to observe rightfully that the CD is at a crossroads of relevance. I shall not contest this observation. Yet I am inclined to describe our inability to start concrete work as the need for fallow time after the abundant harvest of August 1996. I am confident that continued laborious work like ours, Mr. President, will help replenish the soil and grow sturdy crops shortly.

The CD is a very different place today, in many respects, than it was when I used to observe the work of its predecessors from the public gallery 29 years ago. The cold war, which moulded the Ten-Nation Disarmament Committee, the ENDC, the CCD and the Committee on Disarmament, has ended. Yet the vestiges of the cold war period still exist in the CD. Our agenda remains the same as it was more than two decades ago. There is, in my view, an urgent need for the CD to bring its agenda into line with the present realities and requirements of the international community. Moreover, the CD maintains its triangular group system, plus the Group of One, which is a relic of a bygone era. Let us divest ourselves of this anachronistic system. My experience in the CD over the past two years has strengthened my conviction that "like-mindedness" on each item under consideration should be the sole criterion in group formation.

It is true that the international community aspires to a world free from nuclear weapons. A global ban on nuclear weapons and their total elimination is the ultimate objective within the framework of general and complete disarmament. Yet while pursuing that objective, we must act with realism.

(Mr. Uluçevik, Turkey)

We must not lose sight of the fact that the CD cannot replace the bilateral negotiating process involving the two major nuclear-weapon States for nuclear arms reductions. Likewise, we must not lose sight of the fact that non-nuclear-weapon States have a legitimate interest and concern in acquainting themselves with the course of the bilateral negotiating process and the possible challenges involved therein. I personally believe that there is a need for us to stretch our imagination to the utmost to reach an appropriate understanding that would enable the CD to consider issues of nuclear disarmament in a focused and balanced manner. This would not only be in keeping with transparency but also would enhance confidence and create an overall favourable atmosphere.

As far as our work programme is concerned, it would certainly be desirable, as much as it is ideal, to take progressive steps that would lead to the initiation of work, and possibly negotiations, on FMCT, PAROS, NSA, APL and TIA. Yet the need for realism should compel us in my view to suffice with FMCT and APL at this juncture.

In our days, arms smuggling and illicit arms sales, together with a wave of cruel and blind terrorism, pose growing dangers to the international community. Therefore, in my view, there is a need for the CD to find ways of addressing this worldwide phenomenon in all its aspects. I hope it will be possible in the not too distant future for the CD to concretely deal with issues involving small arms.

Serving as a representative in the CD has been a unique and rewarding experience for me. Because the CD - and I say this with conviction - is not only a Conference but, more than that, is a school for diplomats of all ranks and capacity. I wish to thank all my distinguished colleagues for the friendship and cooperation which I have always enjoyed from them. Their outstanding performances have been a source of inspiration to me. I would like to single out the distinguished Secretary-General of the CD, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, to express my appreciation and thanks for the valuable support he has always extended to me and to my delegation. I wish also to state that it has been a great pleasure for me to work together once again with our distinguished Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, with whom I worked in New York in the 1970s in the First Committee as well as during the first special session on disarmament. I thank him for his friendly support and cooperation. I would also like to extend my thanks to the members of the secretariat and to the interpreters. Last, but not least, I wish to thank my own staff for their dedicated work and support.

As I say goodbye, I wish you all health, happiness and continued success. I wish the CD every success in living up to the expectations of the international community in the twenty-first century.

Let me cite here a few old words of wisdom which say, "Success is a journey, not a destination". I am confident that the CD's journey will continue.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Turkey for his statement. Are there any other delegations wishing to take the floor at this stage?

As the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament exercised by Switzerland comes to an end, I would like to make a few final comments. As I indicated in my introductory statement on 19 February 1998, my primary objective was to preserve the momentum created at the outset of this session as regards the organization of the work of the Conference. To that end I initiated intensive negotiations on key questions on our agenda, using all the resources of a multilateral dialogue, in the form of informal open-ended consultations, contacts with regional groups and delegations with a particular interest, and bilateral discussions. The results of these consultations have been communicated informally to the members of the Conference and could be summed up as follows.

Item 1 of the agenda, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", was at the centre of my consultations. Despite the fact that it has not been possible at this stage to translate the desire for dialogue in this area into specific decisions, I was able to note a very promising movement towards more precise identification of the obstacles which still stand between us and a practical decision.

Item 3, "Prevention of an arms race in space", witnessed an informal confirmation of agreement in principle to appoint a special coordinator. Intensive negotiations were conducted to define the relevant mandate, which in my view could be continued under the next President.

My consultations on item 4, on "Effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons", confirmed the conclusions drawn by my predecessor in his closing remarks, on 12 February 1998, that is, the emergence of broad agreement on the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on this item. The consultations should therefore be continued so as to transform this broad agreement into a formal decision.

Item 6, "Comprehensive programme of disarmament", was marked primarily by intensive consultations on the question of the appointment of a special coordinator in the area of anti-personnel mines. I noted a narrowing of the differences on this issue, which could constitute a solid basis for continued dialogue.

On item 7, "Transparency in armaments", broad support was confirmed for the appointment of a special coordinator. On the other hand, a few questions of a general nature still have to be clarified before the next formal stage can begin.

In conclusion, and to use the terms of my introductory statement of 19 February, the Conference has not yet been able to overcome all the obstacles and open the way towards the establishment of machinery which would enable it to begin its substantive work. On the other hand, it has been able

(The President)

to maintain and deepen a constructive dialogue, thanks to the cooperation of all delegations which supported this process begun by the presidency. I would therefore like to express my gratitude for the support which you have given me in the pursuit of the objectives of the Conference. I would like to thank in particular the group coordinators and the representative of China, Ambassador Palihakkara and Ambassador Rodríguez Cedeño of the Group of 21, Ambassador Agurtsou of the Eastern European Group, Ambassador Uluçevik of the Western Group and Ambassador Li. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and their whole team for their exemplary readiness to help and their wise advice. It remains for me only to wish my successor in the post of President of the Conference, Mr. Taher Al-Hussami, of the Syrian Arab Republic, every success during his term of office. The representative of Australia, Ambassador Campbell, has asked for the floor.

Mr. CAMPBELL (Australia): I am sorry to interrupt your final remarks, Mr. President, but I thought you might be going to gavel the meeting closed before I at least had a chance to ask: Where do we stand now in regard to documents and proposals? If I pick up the analogy that my neighbour used during the course of the informal discussions, are we, next week, starting at the last yard of the race, or do we start right from the beginning again? If we start from the beginning again, I will understand. If we are starting from the last yard, what is the baton that we are carrying for the last yard, as a result of building on the informals that we had today, which I think were very useful?

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of Australia for his question. My answer is clear: we have held informal consultations, which you have attended. I have tried to bring the Conference to a decision; that was not yet possible at this stage, but as always, I am of course in the hands of the Conference as regards the rest of the meeting. Everything that happens next week, of course, will be in the hands of my successor, the representative of Syria, so obviously the President who is still in office, but who will be the outgoing President next week, will not be able to speak on this point. So that is my answer.

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 19 March 1998 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.